

10 May 1966

George A. Carroll
Office of the Vice President
Executive Office Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear George,

With regard to your 3 May letter, since he went to Hue on 11 April, Tri Quang has indeed more or less dropped out of the limelight. The advertised object of his current activity is to explain the mid-April "agreements" with the Government to the Hue Buddhists and their followers and bring them aboard so far as actions are concerned, i.e., damp down their agitation and keep them from giving the GVN an excuse to renege. Tri Quang has made one major speech (on 18 April) in which he personally endorsed the compromise worked out in Saigon, though his speech included a number of unhelpful comments about Thieu, Ky and "the Americans". The tenor of Tri Quang's remarks made it clear that although his "struggle movement" might be toned down, it would not be terminated or disbanded.

Tri Quang indicated in late April that he intended to remain in I Corps until the constituent (or constitution-drafting) assembly was established -- i.e., until late summer or early fall. He obviously plans to remain in the area where his organized support is strongest and, unquestionably, will work to develop and strengthen that organization. He may be having some problem in regaining or reasserting full control over it.

Recent struggle broadcasts over Hue radio have employed anti-war, anti-U.S. themes of obvious Communist inspiration. These broadcasts, among other indicators, suggest that VC sympathizers or partisans have worked their way into at least some elements of the struggle movement. If this is indeed the case, Tri Quang may find

such pro-VC elements hard to manage -- or purge -- when he decides they have served his purpose. The struggle movement certainly cannot be said to be under VC control at the present time, but there is the risk that Tri Quang may find he has started something difficult to stop. There is also the danger that if he finds that he cannot control the militant or pro-VC extremists in his movement, to save his own face he may adopt their cause and jump to the head of the anti-war, anti-U.S. parade.

With regard to the second point in your letter, there is, of course, no formal or written "agreement" between the South Vietnamese Government and the Buddhists. There is an understanding that elections will be held within the next few months to form a body which will draft a new constitution. Whether this body will also become the new government is one of the points at issue. I am enclosing copies of such written statements of position or commitment as do exist. A reading of them will make it very clear -- as the Vice President suggests -- that several of the central issues are imprecisely stated and there are numerous ways in which either side may accuse the other of infidelity.

If the Vice President desires further elaboration on these or any other points, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Richard Helms

Enclosures:

- (1) The Buddhists' "Four Points"
- (2) 13 April letter from General Ky to Chairman of the Buddhist Institute
- (3) Text of the GVN's 14 April election decree
- (4) The Buddhist Institute's 16 April Communique

O/DCI/SAVA/VAS:GAC:jmg:10May66

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From Saigon Embassy, Telegram 3321, dated 13 March 1966

Following is unofficial translation full text Communique issued at Buddhist Institute press conference Saigon 1700 local time March 12:

"In recent days the country has been in a state of crisis. Since the November revolution, our country does not yet have effective institutions to inspire prestige at home and abroad, nor to settle the fundamental problems of an independent and democratic country. And also since November 1963 we have witnessed disputes and purges within our ranks.

"This state of affairs has created disunion and friction in the ranks of the army and obstacles dividing the people and the army, thus causing harm to the efforts of national salvation and reconstruction and more suffering to the people who have already borne untold hardships.

"Realizing the danger of destruction, and faithful to the fate of the Fatherland, the Unified Buddhist Church of Viet Nam recognizes the following points:

1. The generals and officers who have contributed to the revolution should be restored to their positions so they can take part in the reconstruction of the country.
2. To avoid political frictions which can create disunion and cause harm to the spirit of unity within the army, the generals serving abroad or at home should return to their purely military duties.
3. The nation urgently needs fundamental institutions characteristic of independence and democracy, a national assembly, and a government of national solidarity.
4. The government should implement without delay what it has promised-even a small part of its promises-for the revolution, particularly the social revolution related to the life of the masses.

Faithful to the spirit of union in this historic period, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam eagerly hopes to contribute along with other civic organizations, religious groups, all classes of people and particularly with the army, toward carrying out the above-mentioned aspirations."

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While question-answer period was in progress a so-called "Proclamation from the Movement of the Youths Students and School Children, Saigon" was circulated. This document, which bears no Buddhist Institute seal (as Communique does), is sharp attack on Chief of State Thieu, the Directorate, General Nguyen Huu Co, Can Lao remnants, government's failure to execute Chinese merchant Ta Vinh. Document was disowned at press conference so it seems likely that certain individuals took advantage of audience press conference provided to distribute tract.

Institute declaration itself is interesting but not necessarily incendiary document. The four points have obviously been drafted with extreme care and certainly avoid any head-on confrontation with Ky Government. No gauntlet is thrown, no dead-line for action is set. No mention is made of Thi's removal and in fact, during question-answer period, it was stated that there was no connection between conference and that event. Point one of Communique could be read as not necessarily relating to Thi in view of fact that he was in exile in Cambodia when 1963 coup took place.

Nevertheless, point one is most interesting aspect of entire document. It certainly reads as a call for reinstatement of ousted southern generals "Big" Minh, Tran Van Don and Le Van Kim. Point may very well represent bid for southern Buddhist support for UBA. As Department aware from our reporting, southern Buddhist elements have become disenchanted with UBA to point where leading southern layman Mai Tho Truyen refused to participate in last UBA Biennial Convention in December 1965. Point one may stem from Tri Quang who, though he did not participate in press conference probably had hand in drafting Communique. He had nice things to say about Minh, Don and Kim in mid-February (see para 5, enclosure 1, Embassy Airgram 489, Feb. 17).

As for point three case could be made that Ky Government is already making progress in this direction with blueprint for political development outlined by Ky January 15 speech. As for point four, all Vietnamese can agree with the sentiment.

In sum Communique appears as cautious testing of political wind. Institute has been politically mute for some time--to the point where some of its more influential lay and clerical members have complained about

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its impotence and inaction. To those critics Chau and his colleagues can now reply that they have done "something". They have let government know they are still there and that due attention must be paid them.

Ky and Chau have had at least two separate private meetings over past few days. Ky has indicated his confidence that organized Buddhists are not supporting Thi.

From Saigon Embassy , Telegram 4024, dated 16 April 1966

Following is unofficial translation letter from Prime Minister to Chairman of Buddhist Institute, dated April 13th. (Released April 15):

Subject: Building of Democracy

Ref: Your letter 268-VT/VP of April 7, 1965

The Ven Chairman,

I sincerely thank the Venerable Chairman for well-intentioned words and initiatives of the Ven Chairman and of the Institute's council in his referenced letter.

If only today I reply to your letter it is because I had hoped, that with the clear-sightedness and goodwill of the Institute's council members as well as that of various organizations and people of all strata, the situation would be eased, thereby creating a situation favorable to the work of building national democracy. I would like to inform the Ven Chairman that, as a result of the present widespread trend of public opinion developing among all circles concerning their hope for the establishment of a National Constituent Assembly, I have submitted to the National Leadership Committee a draft decree-law on the establishment of a National Constituent Assembly. I can assure the Ven Chairman that the National Leadership Committee will promulgate this decree-law tomorrow. (Apr 14).

I would like also to give the Ven Chairman answers on various points mentioned in the last paragraph of his referenced letter:

1. On points 1 and 2, I would like to confirm that the Government's stand is: Not to punish or imprison elements who have participated in movements campaigning for freedom and democracy since Mar 11, 1966.

2. On point 3, I would like to confirm that the Government has withdrawn 2 out of 3 battalions sent to the Central Lowlands. The remaining battalion has been moved to Mo Duc, Quang Ngai, in order to participate in anti-Communist military operations.

I hope that the Ven Chairman will realize the Government's effort and goodwill in the solution of the crisis. I also hope that, when the occasion arises, Ven Chairman will give explanations to the Institute's council members as well as to the Buddhist faithful in order to maintain a peaceful

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Saigon VIETNAM PRESS in English 1019 GMT 14 April 1966--B

(Text) Saigon, 14 April--Directory Chairman Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu this morning signed decree-law No. 14/66 concerning the election of a constituent assembly within three to five months.

Full text of the decree reads as follows:

Art. 1--In accordance with the aspirations of all people, a constituent assembly shall be elected with the mission of drafting and approving the constitution of the Republic of Vietnam.

Art. 2--The constituent assembly mentioned in Art. 1 shall be established within three to five months from the day the present decree-law is signed, through universal, direct, and secret balloting all over the territory of the Republic of Vietnam.

Art. 3--The date of the election, the number of representatives, the electoral procedures, the statutes of the representatives, and the organization and administration of the constituent assembly shall be fixed afterward by a decree-law.

Art. 4--The Prime Minister, ministers, and secretaries concerned are entrusted with the mission of putting into application this decree-law. The present decree-law shall be published in the official journal of the Republic of Vietnam, following emergency procedures.

From Saigon Embassy, Telegram 4020, dated 16 April 1966

Following is rough translation of Communiqué issued April 15 by Buddhist Institute:

Following the issuance of Communiqué 21 dated March 12, 1966, the Buddhist Institute made it clear that the purpose of its campaign was to represent the Buddhist people in requesting a constitutional convention (quoc hoi lap hien) and elections as soon as possible. This purpose having been realized as a result of official letter 4213 dated April 13 from the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee (Nguyen Cao Ky) and decree number 014/66 dated April 14, 1966, from the Chairman of the National Leadership Council (Thieu), the Institute announced the stopping of its campaign with the following details:

(a) The Institute accepts the proposal that the elections for a constitutional convention be held within three to five months although previously the Institute had suggested that the elections be held within three months.

(b) Any Government can organize the elections. The Institute thinks that the faithful need not waste their strength thinking about the form of a government which will only last three to five months.

(c) If: The Government does not keep its promise, or imprisons those who campaigned for a legislature, or either the decree or the organization of the election is not honest, then the Institute will have an appropriate attitude and will take appropriate action.

(d) The concept of the Institute concerning the problem of a legislature is that when the nation has a basic institution expressing the maximum unity and equality of the people, then the future government will have been formed in accordance with the Buddhist point of view. When this has been done, the Institute will be free from a situation where unstable governments make victims.

(e) The Institute proclaims that the faithful of the Institute must always, together with the people, follow the struggle for sovereignty and self-determination.

In concluding this Communique, the Institute praises and expresses its gratitude for the efforts and the fearless but non-violent struggle of the Buddhist compatriots, especially those in Central Viet-Nam. The Institute again thanks all groups and the people generally for their unity and single-mindedness, especially that of the Army, with regard to their good will concerning our national sovereignty. End.

Institute also sent letter to "Institute Representatives and all Buddhist Groups at all Levels Throughout the Nation". Letter dated April 15 and signed by Thich Tam Chau. Rough translation follows:

Following the decision of the Vien Hoa Dao, the campaign for a constitutional convention (quoc hoi lap hien) is stopped, and all Buddhist organizations and groups involved in the campaign return to their usual activities and positions. From now on all matters concerning Buddhists should be under the direction of the Vien Hoa Dao. The Institute hopes that all will correctly implement the above decision of the Institute. End.